

Redefined approach to IA Continuum places USFF in driver's seat

BY REBECCA PERRON
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More than 8,300 active duty Sailors and mobilized Navy reservists are deployed throughout the world in support of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) as individual augmentees (IAs), with another 4,600 under orders and preparing for deployment. As Sailors continuously fill these "boots on the ground" assignments with Army units, the Navy has continually reassessed and refined the process for these non-traditional deployments since the IA Continuum began six years ago.

Recently, U.S. Fleet Forces Command (USFF) was named the Executive Agent (EA) of the IA Continuum and assumed the role in August from Task Force IA, which had been operating under the purview of the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) since late 2002. The intent of this transfer of authority was for IA Sailors to experience a more refined and coherent process with one organization leading all aspects of the process.

"In the beginning, there were various levels of support for IA missions from all of the services," said Kate Perlewitz, director of USFF Strategic Planning and Fleet Personnel Transformation. "But within the Navy, there was not a single authority responsible for supporting IA Sailors from the point where a requirement was identified to a year after return. The result was a lot of people doing the best they could, but not a lot of top-level coordination to keep all of the players moving in the same direction."

Before becoming the EA, USFF had operated in the role of Global Forces Manager (GFM).

"As Global Forces Manager," Perlewitz continued, "we had the authority to do certain things, mostly on the front of the process – we were validating and sourcing the requirements up and through the training phase and getting Sailors into theater. Then fast forward to this summer when we became the executive agent. We absorbed the GFM responsibility, and then extended our authority across the IA Continuum, including family support."

The need to fine-tune the IA Continuum has been recognized by Navy leadership on more than one occasion, resulting in many changes along the way. These changes include the Naval Mobilization Processing Site (NMPS) overseeing active duty IAs since 2005. Traditionally, the NMPS mission has been to process only reservists mobilized during wartime. Fleet and Family Support Center (FFSC) IA programs have also undergone a thorough review and restructuring, resulting in the implementation of new support programs offered to IA Sailors and their families.

In Oct. 2006, the Expeditionary Combat Readiness Center (ECRC) at Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek stood up as a command. ECRC's mission is to ensure effective processing, equipping, training, certification,

deployment and redeployment for the Sailor, while providing proactive family support of those deployed, ultimately placing ECRC as the IA Sailor's and family's advocate.

The Navy began offering IA assignments as permanent change of station (PCS) orders through Global War on Terrorism Support Assignments (GSA) in 2007. Through this shift in billet sourcing, Sailors are able to plan for IA assignments as part of a planned rotation, instead of receiving temporary additional duty (TAD) orders on short notice. Although some IA Sailors still receive TAD orders, the goal is to source all IA assignments through the GSA process.

To help ensure ECRC, FFSC and parent command personnel are able to keep in contact with family members during an IA deployment, all family member point of contact information is now required to be maintained

in the Navy Family Accountability and Assessment System (NFAAS). IA Sailors must update this information as part of the pre-deployment checklist.

In 2008, commands were required to appoint a Command Individual Augmentee Coordinator (CIAC) to assist their IA Sailors with the screening process and deployment preparations, regardless of whether the Sailor has TAD or GSA orders. The object of this new CIAC role is to help make sure Sailors are qualified and prepared to deploy before reporting to NMPS for processing. In order to make this screening process cohesive and all inclusive, an expeditionary deployment screening process has been developed, because the administrative and medical requirements are more extensive than the typical sea duty or overseas screening Sailors normally complete. The screening form, called

the ECRC IA checklist, is available at ECRC's Web site and through Navy Knowledge Online (NKO).

According to ECRC's commanding officer, Capt. Jeffrey L. McKenzie, working with USFF to expand on such changes and further refine the process has been beneficial.

"Fleet Forces gives us a single point of contact with all of the major stakeholders in the Navy, to develop, draft, formulate and implement policy vice having a shotgun-type approach," McKenzie said. "The IA Executive Steering Committee is a great venue to make recommendations and advocate at the four-star level for the Sailors performing the IA tour and their families."

Since assuming the role of EA, USFF began issuing "IA Grams" to continue supporting the mission and communicating all facets of the IA process and the resources available to Sailors and their families.

"The IA Grams, if you take them line-by-line, they are all evidence of the policies changes since U.S. Fleet Forces has taken over as executive agent," McKenzie said. "They delineate individual command responsibilities, including Navy Central Command, ECRC and the various stakeholders, which is absolutely critical. Part of the challenge we have is moving the Sailors from the fleet, putting them into non-traditional roles for a year or more and bringing them back into a Navy environment. It requires a very detailed understanding of everyone involved, from individual fleet units to CNO staff, on who is responsible for doing what so tasks don't fall through the cracks."

In October, USFF began a 100-day plan to address top concerns.

"With a 100-day plan, we could quickly identify the most immediate problems, so we could begin to prioritize those issues and begin to develop solutions and recommendations for change," Perlewitz explained.

"We have seen some very positive changes in that the five major stakeholders, which are the Chief of Naval Personnel (CNP), Chief of Naval Installations Command (CNIC), the Bureau of Surgery and Medicine (BuMed), Chief of Naval Reserve (CNR) and U.S. Fleet Forces Command, are all beginning to coalesce and integrate efforts."

Perlewitz said these five stakeholders are now looking beyond the 100 days, to further broaden and deepen the focus of the four major areas of concern – operation stress control for all IAs, family support, Return, Reunion and Reintegration (3R) and the GSA process. Perlewitz explained BuMed is also conducting a rigorous review of the medical screening process, and USFF is working to combine the 27 Naval Administrative messages (NAVAD-MINS) released in the past two years into one Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV) instruction to cover all aspects of IA deployments, which should be released early this year.

For more information about the IA Continuum or to obtain a copy of the ECRC IA checklist, visit www.ecrc.navy.mil or <https://www.nko.navy.mil>. For IA Grams and IA Continuum information from USFF, visit www.effc.navy.mil/augmentees/index.htm.

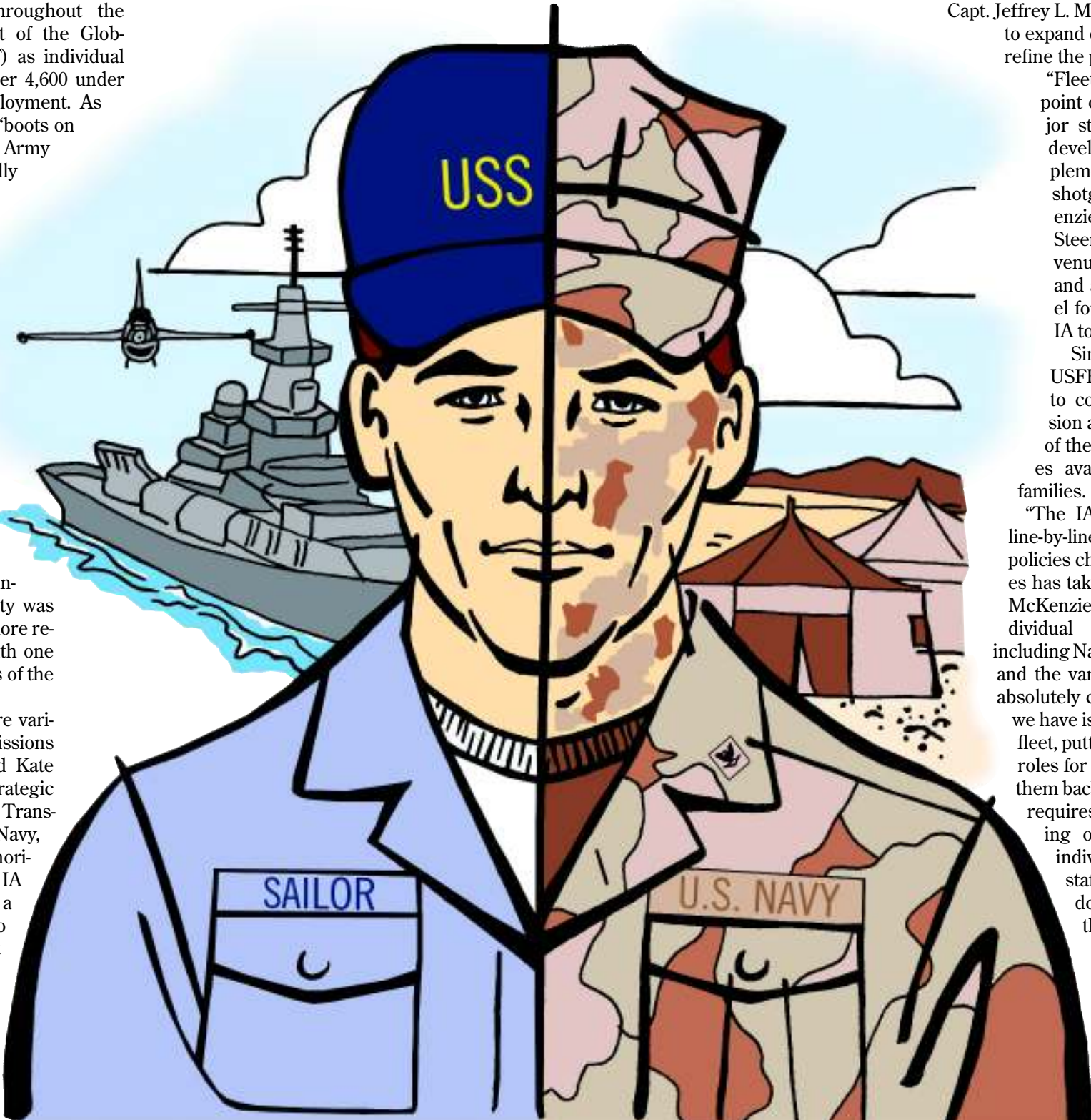


Illustration by David Todd



Photo by MC2 Sandra M. Palumbo

During the Warrior Transition Program (WTP) in Kuwait's Expeditionary Combat Readiness Center (ECRC), Navy Individual Augmentees (IA) have their inventory sheets verified to show that all of their combat gear has been turned in after completing their tour of duty. ECRC established the WTP to assist Sailors while they transition from their tours in a combat environment back to the states. This gives Sailors a chance to decompress from a high-stress-combat environment, turn in gear, clear customs, receive end-of-tour briefs and prepare follow-on travel arrangements.



Photo by MC1 Jackey Bratt

Sailors conduct patrol and troop-leading operations during the Navy's Individual Augmentee Combat Training (NIACT) at Fort Jackson, S.C. The fast-paced, two-week program is instructed by Army drill sergeants who provide Sailors basic-combat skills such as, weapons qualifications, basic first aid, land navigation, hand-to-hand combat, urban operations, and cultural awareness training. These Sailors are preparing for a deployment as Individual Augmentees (IAs), mostly to the U.S. Central Command's Area of Responsibility (AOR).

IA Continuum Timeline

- Individual Augmentees (IA) Continuum begins under Task Force IA in support of the Global War on Terrorism in December 2002.
- Naval Mobilization Processing Sites begin to process active duty IA Sailors in 2005, in addition to mobilized reservists.
- Fleet and Family Support Center's IA programs receive rigorous review, resulting in implementation of revised and new programs.
- Expeditionary Combat Readiness Center (ECRC) stands up in October 2006, overseeing the IA process and providing support to IA families.
- Global War on Terrorism Support Assignments are offered beginning in 2007 to allow Sailors to volunteer for IA assignments at their projected rotation dates.
- An IA expeditionary screening form is issued through ECRC to standardize the pre-deployment process and ensure suitability for a non-traditional deployment.
- Commands are required to assign a Command IA Coordinator to assist IA Sailors with the expeditionary screening process and deployment preparations, as well as provide family support.
- U.S. Fleet Forces Command (USFF) assumes role as Executive Agent for the IA Continuum in August 2008.
- USFF begins issuing IA Grams and embarks on a 100-day plan to review the IA Continuum and write an IA OPNAV instruction.